

Understanding Dental Waste



There are *two* factors to consider concerning the disposal of any items containing dental amalgam, no matter whether those items may be extracted teeth with amalgam restorations, amalgam separators, cartridges or traps from amalgam separators, left over pieces of amalgam, or unused amalgam capsules.

THE TWO CONCERNS ARE:



1. Amalgam contains both silver and mercury, and both of those elements, when being disposed of, constitute Hazardous Waste. The Environmental Protection Agency has very strict rules concerning the disposal of Hazardous Wastes.

2. The amalgam may also be contaminated and biohazardous, because it has been in contact with oral tissues or fluids. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Department of Transportation have very strict rules about biohazardous waste.

Both the hazardous waste concern and the biohazardous concern, therefore, must be addressed when disposing of amalgam.

Hazardous Waste Concern – Amalgam Mailback Program

Regulated Medical Waste is not Hazardous Waste, and it may not contain any items of Hazardous Waste whatsoever. Since amalgam being wasted constitutes Hazardous Waste, no item containing amalgam may ever be placed in Regulated Medical Waste. Neither amalgam separators, extracted teeth containing amalgam, nor any other form of amalgam, therefore, may ever be placed in Regulated Medical Waste.

Amalgam Mailback Program

So how may a dental practice dispose of amalgam containing waste? Stericycle has a solution. Amalgam containing items may be processed through Stericycle's Amalgam Mailback Program. This program is an alternative to disposing of amalgam as Hazardous Waste. Please contact Stericycle at 800-355-8773 for details. While the Amalgam Mailback Program provides a solution to the concern about the proper disposal of mercury and silver, the biohazardous concern must still be addressed.



Biohazardous Concern – Disinfection and Decontamination

Any form of contact amalgam (extracted teeth containing amalgam, residue from amalgam traps and separators, etc., that has been in contact with the oral environment or fluids from that environment) must first be disinfected so as to render it non-biohazardous before shipment for recycling in a program such as the Stericycle Amalgam Mailback Program. Be sure, however, to never autoclave or use bleach or other chlorine-containing solutions for disinfecting items containing amalgam. The CDC's 2003 Guidelines for Infection Control in Dental Health-Care Settings states:

Extracted teeth containing amalgam restorations should not be heat-sterilized because of the potential health hazard from mercury vaporization and exposure. If extracted teeth containing amalgam restorations are to be used, immersion in 10% formalin solution for 2 weeks should be effective in disinfecting both the internal and external structures of the teeth. If using formalin, the manufacturer's MSDS should be reviewed for occupational safety and health concerns and to ensure compliance with OSHA regulations.

If formalin is the disinfectant used, be sure that, prior to shipping the amalgam to Stericycle, the formalin is properly decanted (poured off) and disposed of in accordance with your state and local regulations. Do not ship formalin to Stericycle in the Amalgam Mailback Program.

It is also a best management practice to prepare a card or brief statement stating that the items in the package have been properly disinfected prior to shipment and to place that statement in with the package of material being returned.

Mercury Mailback Program - Mercury in elemental form, as opposed to mercury in amalgamated form, may also be disposed of through Stericycle's separate Mercury Mailback Program.

**If you have any questions
call 1-866-783-7422**



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